

## A PROBABLE NUTTING'S FLYCATCHER IN SOUTHWESTERN NEW MEXICO

DALE A. ZIMMERMAN, Department of Biological Science, Western New Mexico University, Silver City, New Mexico 88061

Early in the afternoon of 18 December 1976 Marian Zimmerman and I closely observed a *Myiarchus* flycatcher, which we believe was a Nutting's Flycatcher (*M. nuttingi*), in the Gila River Valley, approximately 10 km downstream from Riverside, Grant County, New Mexico. Normally, no species of *Myiarchus* occurs in this area during late autumn or winter. The bird was small, with a conspicuously rufous tail and primaries, the latter showing as a prominent reddish streak on the closed wing. The bill was small for the genus and not especially broad. The chin and throat were so pale as to appear white; the breast was pale gray, contrasting with a rather bright yellow belly, the intensity of the color doubtless due in part to the bird's very fresh plumage. Its inner remiges were widely edged with whitish, showing no signs of wear. Similarly, the rectrices were broadly white- or whitish-tipped.

The bird perched low in leafless mesquites and an adjacent sycamore tree. It engaged in flycatching among the bare branches and once flew to the ground to capture an insect. During the 10 minutes or so of our observation, it rarely was more than 2 or 3 m above ground. Once, after actively pursuing an insect, the bird perched with its dorsal surface toward me and with its rectrices somewhat disarranged. What appeared to be the second feather from the left rested largely atop the more central ones, revealing a wholly dark outer web but no dark terminal bar on the inner web; there the bright rufous color appeared to merge directly with the whitish tip. I studied this for perhaps 20 seconds, in full sunlight at a distance of 7 m, with a 10X Zeiss binocular. The distribution of dusky and rufous was evident owing to the glint of sunlight along the rectrix shaft; the feather was in clear, sharp focus. After the flycatcher again took wing, its tail feathers became normally arranged and the pattern described was no longer visible. Marian was viewing from the side and thus could not see the rectrix pattern as could I, viewing from the back.

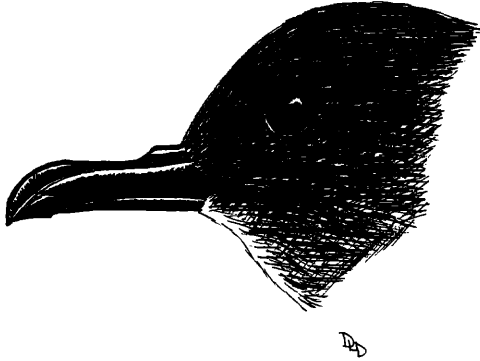
We spent the entire 10 minutes within 5 to 9 m of the bird, which was highly tolerant of our activity and remained in full sunlight. Knowing of the single January record of *M. nuttingi* from Arizona, we studied it to the best of our ability. Collecting was impossible at the site. The bird uttered a note which we have never heard from any other *Myiarchus* including Mexican *nuttingi* (although neither of us is especially familiar with that species' vocalizations). The call, given three times at intervals of 2-3 minutes, was a rather thin, almost whistled, rising single note – not emphatic (like the calls of the Great Crested Flycatcher, *M. crinitus*, or Wied's Crested Flycatcher, *M. tyrannulus*) – yet not plaintive in quality (as is that of the Olivaceous Flycatcher, *M. tuberculifer*). It was a little longer than the ordinary "wheep" note of *M. crinitus* and was vaguely reminiscent of that. It was, however, much softer, more nearly whistled and with no hint of a terminal consonant sound; I transcribed it as *reeeeeeee* or *ereeeeeee*. This was not a truly clear whistle throughout, but possessed a slightly rough quality at the beginning of the call. It was delivered with the bill only partly opened.

Both observers are very familiar with the various North American *Myiarchus* species. We spent years in the East with Great Crested Flycatchers and we have had considerable field experience, spanning three decades, with Wied's Crested Flycatchers in the American Southwest and in Mexico. We see that species at intervals each year in Arizona and New Mexico. The Ash-throated Flycatcher (*M. cinerascens*) we know intimately. It has nested about our home in Silver City where it is a common summer resident. I doubt that there is a vocalization of the species – at least as uttered between April and September – which we do not know. Both of us are familiar with this species throughout its range in Mexico as well, along with the Yucatan Flycatcher

NOTES

(*M. yucatanensis*). Nevertheless, owing to the complexities of *Myiarchus* identifications, it would be presumptuous to state definitely that the December individual was a Nutting's Flycatcher although we strongly suspect this to be the case. Allan R. Phillips and Laurence C. Binford kindly read my notes on the Gila Valley bird; they too suspect it to have been *M. nuttingi*. Observers in the Southwest should pay special attention to any *Myiarchus* flycatchers of unseasonal occurrence. Tape recordings of such birds' vocalizations would be especially useful.

Accepted 26 August 1978



Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*)

Sketch by Donna Dittman

## WANTED: PHOTOGRAPHS

In recent years the photograph has become an important form of documentation for records of rare birds, and a growing number of field ornithologists carry a camera in the field for that purpose. In future issues of *Western Birds*, we plan to print more photographs of rare and unusual birds in the West, to provide a place to publish this valuable documentation. All photos need not be crystal clear, perfectly composed or of first state records. We ask, however, that the bird be identifiable from the photo. Each photo should be accompanied by name of species, date and place photo was taken, significance of sighting, name of photographer and any other pertinent information. Please submit black and white prints. If this is not possible, color slides and prints will be accepted, copied and returned. Submit photos to Stephen A. Laymon, 3290 Ackley Rd., Lakeport, CA 95453.

The accompanying photos of Emperor Geese are examples. Normally a single photo will suffice; in this instance, photos of two individuals in different plumages were available.—SAL



Emperor Goose (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) in first autumn plumage, Sacramento River near mouth of Big Chico Creek, Butte Co., California, 15 October 1972. The Emperor Goose is casual in winter in California, both along the coast and in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys.

Photo by Syd Thomas



Emperor Goose (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) in adult plumage, Moss Landing, Monterey Co., California, 18 March 1978. This individual had been seen in the area since late December 1977.

*Photo by Stephen A. Laymon*

## **Dying in Northern California**

Mono Lake's splendid beauty and its very life need your help! So does California's stronghold California Gull breeding colony 40,000 brave. A primary stopover for a million Eared Grebes annually, forage sanctuary for teeming thousands of migrant shorebirds and indispensable breeding habitat for over 15% of the state's rare Snowy Plover, Mono Lake **is drying up!**

The City of Los Angeles is diverting feeder streams faster than remaining input can battle evaporation.

Do you believe it is fair to the Earth to allow its natural and spiritual energies to be replaced by scrubbed concrete, manicured lawns and more swimming pools?

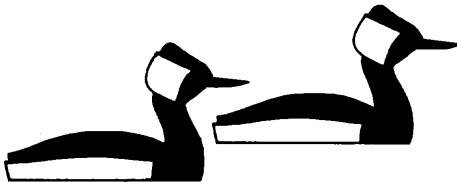
### **WE HOPE YOU DON'T!**

If you cannot act now for the sake of Mono Lake, its proud gulls and its grebes . . . *then help save a beautiful, real vision for your kids.*

Contact the Mono Lake Committee (P. O. Box 2764, Oakland, California 94602) for information on the various ways to become involved. And/or send some tax deductible dollars.

**YOU'LL FEEL LOTS BETTER.**

Rich Stallcup



# **MONO LAKE**

Paid personal advertisement



**Will Russell, Davis Finch,  
Rich Stallcup**

We offer a 6th year of birding trips to our favorite places in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Costa Rica and Western Europe. For information, please write:

**1979**

**NORTHEAST BIRDING  
SEAL HARBOR, MAINE 04675  
207-276-3963**